

"BRILLIANT and hugely ambitious. . . .
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—*The New York Times*

THE BOOK THIEF

MARKUS ZUSAK

THE EXTRAORDINARY *NEW YORK TIMES* #1 BESTSELLER

A close-up photograph of a hand holding a book. The book's cover is dark with a grid of circular holes, resembling a bookplate or a specific type of binding. The background is a blurred library setting with rows of bookshelves filled with books. The lighting is warm and focused on the hand and the book.

A MICHAEL L. PRINTZ HONOR BOOK

DEATH AND CHOCOLATE

First the colors.

Then the humans.

That's usually how I see things.

Or at least, how I try.

• • • **HERE IS A SMALL FACT** • • •

You are going to die.

I am in all truthfulness attempting to be cheerful about this whole topic, though most people find themselves hindered in believing me, no matter my protestations. Please, trust me. I most definitely *can* be cheerful. I can be amiable. Agreeable. Affable. And that's only the A's. Just don't ask me to be nice. Nice has nothing to do with me.

• • • **REACTION TO THE** • • •
AFOREMENTIONED FACT

Does this worry you?

I urge you — don't be afraid.

I'm nothing if not fair.

—Of course, an introduction.

A beginning.

Where are my manners?

I could introduce myself properly, but it's not really necessary. You will know me well enough and soon enough, depending on a diverse range of variables. It suffices to say that at some point in time, I will be standing over you, as genially as possible. Your soul will be in my arms. A color will be perched on my shoulder. I will carry you gently away.

At that moment, you will be lying there (I rarely find people standing up). You will be caked in your own body. There might be a discovery; a scream will dribble down the air. The only sound I'll hear after that will be my own breathing, and the sound of the smell, of my footsteps.

The question is, what color will everything be at that moment when I come for you? What will the sky be saying?

Personally, I like a chocolate-colored sky. Dark, dark chocolate. People say it suits me. I do, however, try to enjoy every color I see—the whole spectrum. A billion or so flavors, none of them quite the same, and a sky to slowly suck on. It takes the edge off the stress. It helps me relax.

• • • A SMALL THEORY • • •

People observe the colors of a day only at its beginnings and ends, but to me it's quite clear that a day merges through a multitude of shades and intonations, with each passing moment. A single *hour* can consist of thousands of different colors. Waxy yellows, cloud-spat blues. Murky darknesses.

In my line of work, I make it a point to notice them.

As I've been alluding to, my one saving grace is distraction. It keeps me sane. It helps me cope, considering the length of time I've been

performing this job. The trouble is, who could ever replace me? Who could step in while I take a break in your stock-standard resort-style vacation destination, whether it be tropical or of the ski trip variety? The answer, of course, is nobody, which has prompted me to make a conscious, deliberate decision—to make distraction my vacation. Needless to say, I vacation in increments. In colors.

Still, it's possible that you might be asking, why does he even need a vacation? What does he need distraction *from*?

Which brings me to my next point.

It's the leftover humans.

The survivors.

They're the ones I can't stand to look at, although on many occasions I still fail. I deliberately seek out the colors to keep my mind off them, but now and then, I witness the ones who are left behind, crumbling among the jigsaw puzzle of realization, despair, and surprise. They have punctured hearts. They have beaten lungs.

Which in turn brings me to the subject I am telling you about tonight, or today, or whatever the hour and color. It's the story of one of those perpetual survivors—an expert at being left behind.

It's just a small story really, about, among other things:

- * A girl
- * Some words
- * An accordionist
- * Some fanatical Germans
- * A Jewish fist fighter
- * And quite a lot of thievery

I saw the book thief three times.

THE MOST TALKED-ABOUT BOOK OF 2006—
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“Zusak doesn’t sugarcoat anything, but he makes his ostensibly gloomy subject bearable the same way Kurt Vonnegut did in *Slaughterhouse Five*: with grim, darkly consoling humor.” —*Time*

“Absorbing and searing.” —*The Washington Post*

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A BOOKLIST BEST BOOK OF THE YEAR • A BULLETIN BLUE RIBBON BOOK



It is 1939. Nazi Germany. The country is holding its breath.
Death has never been busier, and will become busier still.

By her brother’s graveside, Liesel Meminger’s life is changed when she picks up a single object, partially hidden in the snow. It is *The Grave Digger’s Handbook*, left there by accident, and it is her first act of book thievery. So begins a love affair with books and words, as Liesel, with the help of her accordion-playing foster father, learns to read. Soon she is stealing books from Nazi book-burnings, the mayor’s wife’s library, wherever there are books to be found.

But these are dangerous times. When Liesel’s foster family hides a Jew in their basement, Liesel’s world is both opened up and closed down.

In superbly crafted writing that burns with intensity, award-winning author Markus Zusak has given us one of the most enduring stories of our time.

READING GROUP GUIDE ENCLOSED